PUTIN’S REVOLUTION

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Introduction: A New Kind of Sovereignty

"On the eve of the millennium," writes Shaun Walker, "Yeltsin announced that he was stepping down. He left the country mired in poverty, the wealth in the hands of a few greedy oligarchs and the army fighting a grim and demoralizing war in Chechnya.

"Perhaps most troubling of all, Yeltsin's years in charge did not provide a clear idea of what kind of country modern Russia should be. Gleb Pavlovsky, a spin doctor and 'political technologist' who worked for both Yeltsin's and Putin's Kremlin, later told me about the panic during the handover period: 'There was a real sense that Yeltsin could leave and there would be utter chaos. Most of the population didn't recognize the Russian Federation as a real thing. They felt like they lived in some kind of strange offshoot of the Soviet Union. We had to ensure the handover, but we also had to create some sense of nation.'"[1]

The question of which way Russia would turn became acute. Would the country remain democratic and liberal, at least formally? Or would it seek a more traditional (for Russia) and authoritarian form of government? Would the country stay within its present borders? Or would it adopt an expansionist course, and attempt to restore the borders of the Soviet Union? Above all, would it define itself as Russian or Soviet? A survey conducted towards the end of the 1990s indicated that a high percentage of Russians still saw themselves as Soviet – a witness both to the success of Soviet propaganda in the Brezhnev era, which created a kind of Soviet patriotism in many nations of the empire, and to the failure of the post-Soviet regime of Yeltsin to change Russians' basic perception of themselves.

"In March 1993, 63 per cent of Russians said they regretted that the Soviet Union had collapsed. By the end of 2000, the figure had risen to 75 per cent." [2] Putin played into this mood when he famously remarked that he saw the fall of the Soviet Union as the twentieth century's greatest geopolitical tragedy.

Protopriest Lev Lebedev wrote that in Russia "the ideological idol under the name of 'fatherland' ('Russia', 'the state') has been completely preserved. We have already many times noted that these concepts are, in essence, pagan ideological idols not because they are in themselves bad, but because they have been *torn out* from the trinitarian *unity* of co-subjected concepts: Faith, Tsar,

[1] Walker, *The Long Hangover. Putin's New Russia and the Ghosts of the Past,* Oxford University Press, 2018, p. 12.

[2] Walker, op. cit., p. 14.

Fatherland (Orthodoxy, Autocracy, People)… Everything that one might wish to be recognized and positive, even the regeneration of the faith, is done under the slogan of 'the regeneration of the Fatherland (Russia)'! But nothing is being regenerated. Even among the monarchists the regeneration of the Orthodox Autocratic Monarchy is mainly represented as no more than the means for the regeneration of the Fatherland. We may note that if any of the constituent parts of the triad – Orthodoxy, Autocracy, People – is torn away from the others and becomes the only one, it loses its power. Only *together* and in the indicated hierarchical order did they constitute, and do they constitute now, the spiritual (and all the other kinds of) strength and significance of Great Russia. But for the time being it is the ideological idol 'fatherland' that holds sway…"[3]

Orthodox monarchist writers of the Russian diaspora, such as Archbishop Averky (Taushev) and Archimandrite Konstantin (Zaitsev) often used to that the only hope for the salvation of mankind from its rapid descent into Satanism was the return to power of the Russian Orthodox Autocracy. By "Orthodoxy" they meant true Orthodoxy, not the Soviet imitation of it provided by the Moscow Patriarchate. And by "Autocracy" they meant, not a constitutional monarchy on the English model, still less any kind of absolutist kingship or dictatorship, but the traditional Orthodox symphony of powers.

Now monarchist sentiment was returning to Russia at the turn of the millennium. But then on December 31, 1999, Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin, former head of the FSB (KGB), was appointed Acting President of the Russian Federation. What must be seen as the last phase of the Russian revolution, Putinism, had begun...

"The first Presidential Decree that Putin signed, on 31 December 1999, was titled 'On guarantees for former president of the Russian Federation and members of his family'. This ensured that 'corruption charges against the outgoing President and his relatives' would not be pursued. This was most notably targeted at Mabetex bribery case in which Yeltsin's family members were involved. On 30 August 2000, a criminal investigation (number 18/238278-95) was dropped in which Putin himself was one of the suspects as a member of the Saint Petersburg city government… The case of Putin's alleged corruption in metal exports from 1992 was brought back by Marina Salye, but she was silenced and forced to leave Saint Petersburg.

"While his opponents had been preparing for an election in June 2000, Yeltsin's resignation resulted in Presidential elections being held within three months, on 26 March 2000; Putin won in the first round with 53% of the vote.

[3] Lebedev, *Velikorossia,* St. Petersburg, 1999, p. 655.

"The inauguration of President Putin occurred on 7 May 2000… The first major challenge to Putin's popularity came in August 2000, when he was criticized for the alleged mishandling of the *Kursk* submarine disaster. That criticism was largely because it was several days before Putin returned from vacation, and several more before he visited the scene."[4]

Putin's election in March, 2000 was rigged by an academic, the rector of the Gorny university, Vladimir Litvinenko. How he did this was revealed by his daughter, Olga, who took part in the process. Having turned against her father, "Putin's cashier", as she called him, Olga Litvinenko also expressed the opinion that the main cause of Putin's rise to power was Yeltsin's failure to pass a law removing all KGB agents from positions of power in the state…[5]

Certainly, it was the KGB that profited most of all from Putin's rise. In Soviet times, the country had been run by the Party, the Army and the KGB. By 2000 only the KGB was left standing; Putin allowed it to penetrate all parts of the State and the economy (black and otherwise).

The criticism Putin received for the *Kursk* disaster shocked him, and convinced him that his first task was to muzzle the free press – which he did… Then, from 2003 he began to reverse the main gains of the liberal 1990s – religious freedom, and a more open and honest attitude to the Soviet past. Churches were seized from True Orthodox Christians and their websites hacked; elections were rigged, independent journalists were killed; independent businessmen were imprisoned on trumped-up charges; new classroom history books justifying Stalinism were introduced; the red flag and hammer and sickle were restored to the armed services, as well as the melody (if not the words) of the Soviet national anthem.

In many ways, Putin's regime resembled Hitler's in the 1930s. Thus youth organizations similar to the Hitler Youth were created[6], and nationalism was ramped up. Not in vain was he nicknamed "Putler"…

In spite of that, Putin called his type of rule "sovereign democracy". That meant, on the one hand, that Russia was a democratic nation, just like other democratic nations of the West, and on the other, that Russia would not be pushed around by the West because it now had a real *sovereign*.

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[4] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vladimir_Putin.

[5] Litvinenko, in *Radio Svoboda,* March 19, 2018.

[6] Edward Lucas, *The New Cold War,* London: Bloomsbury, 2008, p. 102.

For hatred of America is perhaps Putin's deepest passion (after money-making). Here the decisive factor is the still-unexorcised demons of the Cold War, and the burning desire of the loser to take revenge on the victor, like the seventh head of the beast who is defeated and wounded but miraculously recovers (Revelation 13.3). Thus in 2005 during his annual State of the Union address Putin declared: "First and foremost it is worth acknowledging that the demise of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century. As for the Russian people, it became a genuine tragedy. Tens of millions of our fellow citizens and countrymen found themselves beyond the fringes of Russian territory."[7]

The real significance of the use of the term "sovereign democracy" was that authoritarianism was back - sovereignty in Russia belonged now, not to the people, but to one man, Putin. In the words of the German journalist Boris Reitschuster, this was what one might call "democratura".[8] Or, as Yegor Kholmogorov put it, Putin had a "mandate from heaven" in the image of the Chinese emperors. What this meant in practical terms was demonstrated in 2008, when Putin came to the end of his two terms (the maximum allowed) as democratically-elected President of Russia. In that period, he had successfully muzzled the media and subjected the regions to the centre; so he could now move forward to "surrendering" power, while in fact guaranteeing his continuance in it. Thus at a nod from him, Dmitri Medvedev was put forward as candidate for the presidency from Putin's "United Russia" party, and was then elected in a thoroughly fraudulent election. Putin himself became prime minister, but remained the *eminence grise* behind the scenes. And in 2012 he returned as President in a "lawful" and "constitutional" manner. But that he was still in charge while Medvedev was President was demonstrated in 2010, when, as the former Soviet chess champion Garry Kasparov writes, "an advisory panel set up by… Medvedev released a report full of grand liberalization ideas. As positive as this may sound, the institute's chief, Igor Yurgens, then admitted in an interview that in the end 'Putin will make any decision he likes', and that 'free elections are impossible in Russia today because the Russian population is politically ignorant, passive and dislikes democracy.' His conclusion was that therefore 'Mr. Putin and Mr. Medvedev should decide' who was to be president!"[9]

In the summer of 2020 a referendum was held on several major changes to the Russian Constitution. These were a very mixed bag, including such amendments as: on banning same-sex marriage

[7] http://www.glennbeck.com/2015/01/13/the-root-of-the-problem-russia-part-1-2/?utm_source=glennbeck&utm_medium=contentcopy_link

[8] Kasparov, *Winter is Coming,* London: Atlantic Books, 2015, p. 182.

[9] Kasparov, op. cit., pp. 201-202

(probably the most genuinely popular), on patriotic education in schools, on placing the constitution above international law and on allowing Putin to run again two more six-year presidential terms. Citizens were not allowed to vote separately on each issue; the vote had to be “yes” for all or “no” for all. 79% of the voters dutifully voted “yes”. Putin was effectively president for life…

1. The Money Revolution

Putin’s popularity in the 2000s was largely owing to the fact that the country was growing richer. He was not responsible for that: already in 1999, GDP had grown 10%, and in the 2000s the world price for oil rose over 700%. Most of that wealth was taken by Putin and his new generation of oligarchs. However, enough filtered down to the bureaucracy and the middle class to keep them moderately, at any rate, happy.

“The oligarchs of the 1990s,” writes Kasparov, “may have been robbing Russia blind, but at least we could find out about it in the press. Those days are over and the elite circle of oligarchs around Putin have power and riches beyond the dreams of Yeltsin’s entourage. In 2000, when Putin took charge, there were no Russians in the *Forbes* magazine list of the world’s billionaires. By 2005 there were thirty-six. In 2008 there were eighty-seven, more than Germany and Japan combined, in a country where 13 percent of our citizens were under a national poverty line of $150 a month…

“According to the 2015 numbers, even after a year of Western sanctions and plunging oil prices, there are still eighty-eight Russian billionaires on the *Forbes* list, which still doesn’t list Putin or several of his closest cronies. I find it impossible to believe that a man like Putin who holds the power of life and death over eighty-eight billionaires is not the richest of them all. The occasional leaks about mysterious Black Sea mansions and enormous bank transfers to nowhere add more circumstantial evidence to the case that by now Putin is likely the richest man in the world…”[10]

[10] Kasparov, op. cit., p. 185. Putin’s wealth was estimated in 2007 at about $40 billion. See Luke Harding, “Putin, the Kremlin power struggle and the $40bn fortune”, *The Guardian,* December 21, 2007, pp. 1-2. But in 2013 the *Sunday Times* estimated it at $130 billion, twice that of Bill Gates (http://artemov-igor.livejournal.com/227037.html). In 2012, the former Kremlin adviser Stanislav Belkovsky revised this estimate upwards (Rob Wile, “Is Vladimir Putin secretly the Richest Man in the World?” *Money*, January 23, 2017, https://uk.news.yahoo.com/vladimir-putin-secretly-richest-man-171217146.html). Bill Browder then revised it upwards again: “Is Putin the world's real richest man? After 17 years in power, the Russian leader has a '$200 billion fortune, 58 planes and helicopters and 20 palaces and country retreats” *Daily Mail,* February 20, 2017, http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4242718/Vladimir-Putin-200-billion-fortune.html#ixzz4ZKELKhAz.

Banking on the high price of oil, Putin began to rebuild Russia's economic and military might in the 2000s. But imbalances within the economy hindered diversification. He also had to keep the oligarchs and Mafiosi on his side, which meant that, as the "boss of bosses", he had to keep his hand in organized crime.

Misha Glenny has demonstrated in his important book *McMafia,* that the growth of trade liberalization and globalization in the 1990s engendered an enormous explosion in organized crime throughout the world. It now constitutes not only a significant part of total world economic output, but also a distinct threat to the sovereignty of several nations. Whether we are speaking about drug-trafficking (Colombia, Mexico), people-trafficking (China), counterfeiting (North Korea), gold (India), protection rackets (Japan), guns and bombs (North Korea), banking fraud (Brazil), oil (Nigeria, Libya) or diamonds (South Africa), in each sphere we see both enormous profits and penetration of governments and security forces. The cost not only in taxes but in ruined lives has been particularly horrendous in the case of drug-trafficking; here the criminals have consistently triumphed over the governments; even the war on drugs waged by the United States is judged by experts to have been a total failure, to the extent that decriminalisation – i.e. surrender – is being seriously put forward as the only "solution".

In the 1990s the growth of organized crime in Russia penetrated and overwhelmed not only the elected government, but even the mighty KGB; the boundaries between business, law enforcement and the Russian mafia became hard to make out; and the power of the Russia mafia spread also to places like Israel, Czechia and Hungary. Putin made great electoral capital out of his claims to control these oligarchs and *mafiosi*. And indeed, some of the oligarchs of the 1990s – those who refused to buckle under to Putin, like Berezovsky and Gusinsky (in the media) and Khodorkovsky (in oil) – were indeed tamed, imprisoned, or expelled. Thus Glenny writes: "In the 1990s, the oligarchs and gangsters clearly controlled the Kremlin. Under Vladimir Putin, who systematically used popular hostility to the oligarchs to strengthen his political position as President, the situation was reversed: criminal and oligarch interests were subordinate to state interests. It does not follow that Putin and friends persecuted criminals or dispensed with corrupt practices. On the contrary, they flourished as before but they are now much more carefully controlled. Of course, it is often difficult to tell who is truly running the show – the chicken or the egg!"[11]

[11] Glenny, *McMafia,* pp. 98-99. Recently, Said Amirov, the Dagestani gangster politician, was arrested and imprisoned, which has elicited speculation that the government may be reasserting its authority over the gangsters – that is, the non-governmental gangsters. Marc Galeotti writes: "The modern Russian state is a much stronger force than it was in the 1990s, and jealous of its political authority. The gangs that prosper in modern Russia tend to do so by working with rather than against the state. In other words: do well by the Kremlin, and the Kremlin will

Whoever truly runs the show, it is clear that the personal financial interests of Putin and his friends[12] play a major, perhaps a predominant, role in his politics.[13] Anders Aslund writes: "Putin controls the Russian state institutions, its secret police and its big state companies. Together with a few old friends from St. Petersburg, the president is tapping the big state companies through overpriced no-bid procurement, transfer pricing, asset stripping and stock manipulation. They are also making money by extorting old oligarchs and taking loans from state banks, not to be returned.

1:55

"Boris Nemtsov, who was murdered outside of the Kremlin [in 2015], and still-active opposition politician Vladimir Milov exposed this kleptocracy in their booklet 'Putin and Gazprom' in 2008. A more extensive account in English is Karen Dawisha's book *Putin's Kleptocracy: Who Owns Russia?* The Panama Papers, a series of leaked documents on offshore accounts released in April 2016, offered plenty of evidence of Putin's secret wealth.

"Overall assessments indicate a personal enrichment of Putin and his closest cronies of some $20 billion to $25 billion a year since 2006. Nemtsov and Milov documented pilfering from Gazprom of $60 billion from 2004 to 2007, and this was probably just over half of their enrichment, which has only increased. By now, this group would have accumulated $240 billion to $300 billion. Businessman Bill Browder estimates that Putin is the richest man in the world, with a personal wealth of $200 billion. Total private Russian holdings abroad are assessed in the range of $800 billion to $1.3 trillion, according to Global Financial Integrity and a National Bureau of Economic Research study."[14]

The close relationship between Putin's foreign policy and his personal financial interests was emphasized in May, 2016 by the new American National Security Adviser, General Macmaster. After pointing out that "Russia invaded Ukraine without being punished, established dominance over this territory and then turned the situation in such a way as to pretend that we and our allies are

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turn a blind eye. If not, you will be reminded that the state is the biggest gang in town." ("Gangster's Paradise: How Organised Crime Took Over Russia", *The Guardian,* March 23, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/mar/23/how-organised-crime-took-over-russia-vory-super-mafia)

[12] The fantastic wealth of Putin's cronies is described in great detail by Catherine Belton in *Putin's People,* London: William Collins, 2020.

[13] This was written before Putin's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, after which massive financial and economic sanctions have substantially reduced his influence on the world economy, although Europe's dependence on Russian oil and gas remains an important factor.

[14] Aslund, "It's Time to Go After Vladimir Putin's Money in the West", *The Washington Post,* March 29, 2018.

escalating matters," the general went on to draw attention to the complex strategy employed by Moscow, which was based on a combination of two factors – 'the usual forces' [i.e. the military] and, under their cover, 'the much more complex campaign bound up with the use of criminality and organized crime.'"[15]

Indeed, the long post-Soviet campaign of the KGB to undermine Ukrainian independence, which involved attempts to assassinate pro-western politicians, appears to have owed as much to "turf wars" between Russian and Ukrainian oligarchs as to anything else.[16]

Of course, the purely political desire to restore the Soviet empire to its pre-1992 boundaries, was another very important motive. But it is very difficult to disentangle such supposedly "pure" political motives from dirty financial ones. Thus there can be little doubt that the oligarchs that control such monstrous State-mafia companies as Gazprom and Rosneft are vitally interested in acquiring complete control over the oil and gas pipelines that pass through Ukraine. Other wars that Putin has conducted – in Chechnya, in Georgia and in Syria – also "coincidentally" happen to have important pipelines passing through them. If the United States is sometimes accused of conducting wars in the Middle East for the sake of oil interests, the same can be said with still greater confidence about Russia.

Anton Grigoriev writes: "Few are those who take account of the fact that criminality in the 2000s was not conquered, but *integrated.* In Putin's time, not only have the Chechens become the greatest patriots of the Russian Federation, but also the Russian 'thieves in law'. Who, let us say, will now fail to call Joseph Kobzon, not only Russian, and a member of 'One Russia' [Putin's political party] but also a loyal patriot loyal to the authorities? But in the 1990s Kobzon was one of the deputies who did not enter into any of the deputies' groupings, was not a member of the party of power of that time, and was forbidden entry into the USA, with which the Russian Federation at that time entertained the best official relations. Since 1995 he had been forbidden entry because of suspicions that he was linked with organized crime. Several attempts to get an American visa, including with the help of diplomatic channels, led to nothing. But in the 2000s Kobzon became a political figure of pan-national reputation – the president of the Culture Committee of the State Duma from 'One Russia', and deputy-president of the Committee for Information

[15] "Sovietnikom Trumpa po natsbezopasnosti stal ideologom vojny s Rossiej" (Trump's counselor on security has become an ideologue of war with Russia), *Kavkaztsentr*, February 21, 2017, http://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2017/02/21/114276/sovetnikom-trampa-po-natsbezopasnosti-stal-ideolog-vojny-s-rossiej.shtml.

[16] Andrei Illarionov, "Boevoj put' FSB v Ukraine" (The martial path of the FSB in Ukraine), *Online Kiev,* June 10, 2014, http://kiev-online.net.ua/politika/andrei-illarionov-boevoi-put-fsb-v-ukrai.html.

Politics. That is, he became one of the authorities. In the 1990s there was unorganized crime. In the 2000s this turned into the vertically integrated backbone of the new order."[17]

But if Putin undoubtedly turned the tables on the mafia, or "integrated himself" with them to such an extent that he became "the boss of bosses" and the richest of them all, whose interests (apart from his own) did he ultimately represent?

There can be only one possible answer to that question: the KGB/FSB. As Martin Sixsmith writes, "In December 1999,… Vladimir Putin went to celebrate his election victory with his old comrades at the FSB. When the toasts came round and Putin proposed they should drink 'To Comrade Stalin' there was a shocked silence followed by a loud cheer. Putin opened his celebratory speech by jokingly telling his former colleagues: 'The agent group charged with taking the government under control has completed the first stage of its assignment.'…"[18]

"The agent group" now moved on very quickly to the next stage: the re-establishment of the former USSR's military power. Thus, as Masha Gessen writes, only his second decree "established a new Russian military doctrine, abandoning the old no-first-strike policy regarding nuclear weapons and emphasizing a right to use them against aggressors 'if other means of conflict resolution have been exhausted or deemed ineffective'. Soon another decree re-established mandatory training exercises for reservists (all Russian able-bodied men were considered reservists) – something that had been abolished, to the relief of Russian wives and mothers, after the country withdrew from Afghanistan. Two of the decree's six paragraphs were classified as secret, suggesting they might shed light on whether reservists should expect to be sent to Chechnya. A few days later, Putin issued an order granting forty government ministers and other officials to classify information as secret, in direct violation of the constitution. He also re-established mandatory military training in secondary schools, both public and private; this subject, which for boys involved taking apart, cleaning, and putting back together a Kalashnikov, had been abolished during perestroika. In all, six of the eleven decrees Putin issued in his first two months as acting president concerning the military. On January 27 [Prime Minister] Kasyanov announced that defense spending would be increased by 50 percent – this in a country that was still failing to

[17] Grigoriev, "Banditizm 1990-kh godov i novij poriadok pri Putine" (Banditry in the 1990s and the new order under Putin), October 16, 2016, http://anton-grigoriev.livejournal.com/1684413.html?utm_source=fbsharing&utm_medium=social.

[18] Sixsmith, *The Litvinenko File,* London: Macmillan, 2007, p. 302.

meet its international debt obligations and was seeing most of its population sink further and further into poverty…"[19]

Such an order could only mean one thing: that having returned to power after its temporary eclipse in the 1990s, the KGB was returning to the perennial expansionist goals of Soviet politics. Of course, Russia in 2000 was incomparably weaker than it had been even as recently as 1990. But the train was now back on the rails leading to the same goals as Lenin and Stalin had put before themselves. Evidence of this are the vast sums of money spent on the Russian military, and on former vassals of the Soviet Union in the Third World who still received hand-outs in Putin's reign. Thus from 2000 to 2018 $140 billion dollars' of debts were written off to such countries as Vietnam, North Korea, Mongolia and Cuba.[20]

2. The Ideological Revolution

However, certain changes in tactics and methods were now deemed necessary in order to "modernize" the state; these amounted, in effect, to an ideological revolution.

First, the old ideology of Marxism-Leninism had to be ditched. It was out-of-date and obviously false. Of course, telling lies had never been a problem for Soviet leaders and propagandists; but if the whole world saw that the Emperor had no clothes, it was time to discard the Emperor – or give him some new clothes.

Putin admits to continuing to like communist ideas. One of these, clearly, is strict control of the press and other media. Nor is the general population, still saturated in Soviet modes of thinking, necessarily against such methods. According to a 2005 survey, 42% of the Russian people, and 60% of those over sixty, wanted the return of "a leader like Stalin."[21]

Again, in July, 2006, following on a decree by the FSB on March 29, 2003, the Duma passed two laws allowing the secret services to eliminate "extremists" in Russia and on foreign territory, and defining "extremism" to include anyone "libellously critical of the Russian authorities".

Again, old friends still stuck in the old Marxist ways were not discarded. So Zyuganov's Russian Communist Party, as well as

[19] Gessen, *The Man without a Face. The Unlikely Rise of Vladimir Putin,* London: Granta, 2013, pp. 153-154.

[20] Alena Blinova, Facebook, February 21, 2018, https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=541067356273500&set=a.407996966247207.1073741830.100011107219308&type=3&theater

[21] Orlando Figes, "Vlad the Great", *New Statesman,* 3 December, 2007, p. 34.

Zhirinovsky's nationalist "Liberal Democrats", would be given cosy and honoured places in the new order – so long as they did not present a serious threat to Putin's "One Russia", but remained a loyal (extremely loyal) "opposition". (In fact, these opposition parties have been extremely useful to Putin. The Communists have kept the poor old pensioners onside, while Zhirinovsky has been used to air outrageous opinions and policies which Putin adheres to but which he does not want to espouse publicly.) Moreover, old comrades abroad such as the North Koreans and Cubans, and especially the Chinese, would remain comrades, of course.

If the old Soviet ideology would be discarded, a new one would have to be found to take its place. Or an old one… One possibility was Eurasianism, of which Alexander Dugin, one of Putin's advisors, was an adept. Another, closely related one, was the idea of "the Russian Spring".

Paul Gable writes: "Commentators in Moscow and the West ever more frequently draw parallels between Vladimir Putin's ideas and actions and those of fascist regimes in the first part of the 20th century, but few have focused on the fact that one of the Kremlin leader's most-cherished ideas, that of the 'Russian Spring,' was invented by a Russian fascist in the 1920s.

"In a blog post, Pavel Pryannikov corrects that gap, pointing out that 'the "Russian Spring" in fact is not an invention of the present time' but rather that this 'synthesis of fascism, Stalinism, Russian Nationalism and Orthodoxy' was invented by Aleksandr Kazem-Bek, a leading theoretician of Russian fascism in the 1920s.

"While the more familiar Eurasian movement represented the first attempt to 'combine corporatist (proto-fascist) and Bolshevik ideas,' he writes, 'far more popular' among White Russians were the ideas of the Young Russians (*Mladorossy*) whose intellectual leader was Aleksandr Kazem-Bek. "The descendent of an aristocratic family which came from Persia to Russia in the early 19th century, Kazem-Bek was 'completely Russified.' He fought in the White Army and in 1920 at the age of 18, he fled to Europe. There in 1923, he founded the Young Russia Union and served as its chief ideologist.

"The group in his view was to promote 'a certain new type of totalitarian monarchy, the struggle against masonry and international capital and also a life "full of blood, fire, and self-sacrifice."' In Kazem-Bek's view, Russia should have a regime like Mussolini's in Italy but be fully committed to the promotion of 'Russianness.'

“Not only were his ideas derived from fascism, but Kazem-Bek adopted many fascist external features: a uniform, military discipline, and a cult of the leader. He insisted that the old Russia had died because of its corruption and that the Soviet revolution, which was viewed as a catastrophe, was also ‘an apocalypse’ which ‘cleansed’ the Russian nation.

“Kazem-Bek increasingly viewed Stalin as an exemplar of the kind of leader he believed Russia should have, and he insisted that what Russia needed was a combination of Russian autocracy and Bolshevism or as he put it in one of his slogans, “a tsar and soviets” at one and the same time.

“His ideas attracted support among some of the Romanovs and other members of the nobility in emigration. They also attracted the attention of the Soviet secret police, and by the middle 1930s, Kazem-Bek was assumed by many to be a collaborator with the NKVD, all the more so when he declared that Young Russia was the ‘second’ Soviet party.

“Throughout his émigré career, Kazem-Bek was withering in his criticism of ‘European values.’ He insisted that ‘Russia is not a competitor of Europe; it is its successor’ and has the right to dispense with anything harmful in the European tradition. ‘We are not only Europeans,’ he wrote; ‘we are Russians. That is something European chauvinists cannot forgive us for.’

After Mussolini formed his alliance with Hitler in 1939, Kazem-Bek broke with the Italian government and moved to France. By that point, his ideology could be described as ‘Russian Orthodox Stalinism.’ After Germany occupied France, the leader of Young Russia fled to the United States.

“There he began to work with the Russian Orthodox Church and especially with its Moscow Patriarchate wing. In 1957, Kazem-Bek returned to Moscow where he worked in the Moscow Patriarchate’s Department for External Church Relations, which always had close ties with the KGB and out of which the current patriarch came.

“While in that job, Kazem-Bek frequently met with Patriarch Aleksii, Metropolitan Nikolay and other senior churchmen. He lived in Ministry of Defense housing. When he died in February 1977, he was buried in Peredelkino and among those who spoke at his funeral was Archpriest Nikolay Gundyaev, the elder brother of Patriarch Kirill.

“At that time, Father Nikolay Gundyaev said ‘we must not only remember Kazem-Bek, but study him.’ Since the latter’s death, the Moscow Patriarchate has done so. In 2002, on the centenary of

Kazem-Bek's death, Vsevolod Chaplin was among those who took part in a conference on the Young Russia leader.

"Archimandrite Tikhon [Shevkunov], who has been a spiritual advisor to Putin, is known to highly value Kazem-Bek's ideas, Pryannikov says, and it is probably through him that the ideas of a Russian fascist of the 1920s have come to the attention and affected the thinking of the current Kremlin leader."[22]

Whatever ideology Putin chose, Soviet patriotism would have to be a compulsory element of the new order. Hence the return of the melody of the Soviet hymn, the red flag in the armed forces, the resurrection of the pioneers, etc. And, especially, the mythology of the "Great Patriotic War", which has been pumped as never before (not even Stalin used it, because of its nationalist connotations).[23]

Indeed, any doubting of that mythology would now become a criminal offence. Putin himself find this mythology so important that he has taken a hand in the rewriting of the history of Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.[24] Thus Dmitri Volchek writes: "'One Russia' proposes imprisonment for people who spread false information about the activity of the USSR during the war.

"A final version of a bill forbidding the rehabilitation of Nazism is ready. It was worked out by the 'One Russia' fraction in the Duma. The coordinator of the patriotic platform of OR, the president of the Committee for Security Irina Yarovaia, considers it necessary to punish people for 'denial of fact and approval of crimes established by a sentence of the International Military Tribunal, as well as the distribution of knowingly false information about the activity of the USSR during the Second world war connected with accusing people of committing crimes established by the publicly determined sentences of the International Military Tribunal.

"Yarovaia proposes punishing such crimes with a fine of up to 300,000 roubles or imprisonment up to three years. It is proposed that the same actions carried out with the use of one's service status or of the media should be punished with a fine of up to 100,000 – 500,000 rubles or a prison term of up to five years. In previous editions of the bill there was no mention of the USSR; it was a matter only of banning the declaration of the actions of the anti-Hitler forces as criminal. 'Criticism of the USSR is threatened with prison,' warns

[22] Gable, "Putin's 'Russian Spring' Idea was Invented by Russian Fascists in 1920s", *The Interpreter,* July 30, 2014, http://www.interpretermag.com/putins-russian-spring-idea-was-invented-by-russian-fascists-in-1920s/

[23] See Shaun Walker, *The Long Hangover. Putin's New Russia and the Ghosts of the Past,* Oxford University Press, 2018, chapter 2.

[24] Andrei Zubov, "Sovietskaia Istoria Iskazila Soznanie Vladimir Putina", *Novosti Rossii,* June 19, 2020; Owen Matthews, "Vladimir Putin's History Fetish", *The Spectator,* June 20, 2020.

the newspaper *Vedomosti.* 'If the bill is passed, will not historians occupied with the investigation of the crimes of Stalinism find themselves on the bench of the accused?'"[25]

Secondly, since there was an ever-increasing merging of the government, the bureaucracy, the KGB and the mafia, there could be no question of cutting Russia off from the world economy; for the mafia derived most of its ill-gotten gains from outside Russia, and had invested heavily there in houses, yachts, football clubs, companies, their children's education, etc. Of course, this also made the new regime vulnerable to sanctions and to simple operations such as the cutting off of links with western banks. And the sharp decline in the Russian economy as a result of sanctions applied after the invasion of Ukraine has been a serious worry for Putin.

However, it was precisely the New Russians' openness to the West that allowed them to infiltrate it to a degree that Soviet spies could only have dreamed of.

Already in the liberal 1990s an increase in KGB activity in Britain was reported as compared with the Soviet period – and this at a time when many people thought that the KGB no longer existed! In the 2000s and 2010s the spying and the propaganda barrage increased exponentially; foreign-language TV channels such as "Russia Today" beamed into millions of western homes, and began to produce significant fruits. Thus in Germany it was reported that as a result of Russian propaganda the populace had begun to move away from seeing Washington as the main friend of the country, and that Moscow was moving close to taking Washington's place in the ratings. Again, polls show that four NATO countries – Greece, Turkey, Bulgaria and Slovenia – would prefer that Russia come to their aid in time of war than the US.[26]

Only China rivals Russia's ability to infiltrate state institutions, corporations and major infrastructure (nuclear power stations, for example) through *cyber warfare*. Belatedly, NATO has decided to pour more money into combatting this deadly threat, which could give victory to Russia in any future war. Western Europe is particularly vulnerable to Russian hacking and cyber-spying; only Britain's GCHQ at Cheltenham provides significant defence capacity against this new type of warfare. Thus in 2016, when the Russians backed a failed coup attempt against the government of

[25] Volchek, "Kvazireligia Velikoj Pobedy" (The Quasi-religion of the Great Victory), *Radio Svoboda,* February 7, 2014, http://www.svoboda.org/a/25255849.html.

[26] Khorasan, "Chetyre strany NATO predpochli by Soedinennym Shtatam" (Four Countries of NATO would prefer Russia to the United State), *Ortodoksiya,* February 21, 2017, http://www.ortodoksiya.ru/single-post/opros-instituta-Gallup.

Montenegro, the Montenegrins asked for British help in their cyber war with Moscow.[27]

But old-fashioned types of spying remained effective. Indeed, perhaps the most spectacular coup in this field, with incalculable consequences for the future, took place in 2013, when, as is now credibly argued by historians and experts, the present president of the United State, Donald Trump, was caught in a classic honeytrap and probably blackmailed into serving the Russians. Thus the Russian-American historian Yury Felshtinsky wrote on the eve of Trump's electoral victory in 2016: "The behavior of Trump in relation to Russia fits into the schema of an agent's behavior. I shall immediately qualify myself: I have no proofs that he is an agent of Putin. But the whole of his behavior points exclusively to this schema. Agent Trump is not allowed to criticise Putin; he is not allowed to criticise the foreign policy of Russia; he is not allowed to raise the question of the Russian invasion of the Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea; he is not allowed to encourage the strengthening of NATO and opposition to Russian aggression in Europe; he is not allowed to criticise Russian interference in the civil war in Syria.

"Trump is allowed to criticise American policy in relation to Syria and Iraq; to call for the weakening of NATO and the American withdrawal from Europe, Japan and the Muslim East; to call for the smoothing of relations with Russia and the restructuring (in reality, the worsening) of relations with Mexico, on the one hand, and with China, on the other.

"There remains only one winner from the foreign policy programme written for Trump in the Kremlin (which I also cannot prove): Putin.

"I don't know how Trump was recruited (perhaps during his visit to Moscow in 2013 to conduct a beauty contest.) But I know for certain that he was recruited…"[28]

If this hypothesis proves to be true, then it points to the deepest and highest penetration yet into the fortress of the West by the Russian revolution, and the possible fulfilment of the prophecy of Elder Ignaty of Harbin (+1958): "*What began in Russia will end in America."*

Trump and Putin are both essentially crooked businessmen turned politicians. Trump is a real-estate businessman (with several bankruptcies to his name); Putin is in the same business (he owns a

[27] Ben Farmer, "Montenegro's plea for UK Help in Cyber War", *The Daily Telegraph,* March 1, 2017, p. 2.

[28] For more detail on this connection, see Belton, op. cit., chapter 15.

fabulous number of palaces), but with a finger in the pie of almost every other form of organized crime. They unite through their common worship of Mammon – but with Putin as the senior partner controlling the Russian-American organized crime syndicate – and most of the world's nuclear weapons... [29]

The dependency of Trump on Putin precisely in his capacity as a businessman was demonstrated at around the time of Trump's inauguration as president by Sue Naisby Sargent: "Here are the facts why Trump wants to lift the sanctions on Russia and Opposes the Iran Nuclear Deal to Benefit Putin, The Russian Military and Himself:

"1) Trump owes Blackstone/ Bayrock group $560 million dollars (one of his largest debtors and the primary reason he won't reveal his tax returns).

"2) Blackstone is owned wholly by Russian billionaires, who owe their position to Putin and have made billions from their work with the Russian government.

"3) Other companies that have borrowed from Blackstone have claimed that owing money to them is like owing to the Russian mob and while you owe them, they own you for many favors.

"4) The Russian economy is badly faltering under the weight of its over-dependence on raw materials which as you know have plummeted in the last 2 years leaving the Russian economy scrambling to pay its debts.

"5) Russia has an impetus to influence our election to ensure the per barrel oil prices are above $65 (they are currently hovering around $50).

"6) Russia can't affordably get at 80% of its oil reserves and reduce its per barrel cost to compete with America at $45 or Saudi

[29] It may also be the fulfillment of George Orwell's quasi-prophetic allegory, *Animal Farm,* which describes the conflict between the Communists (the pigs) and the Capitalists (the humans) – and their final reconciliation. In the novel's final scene, a deputation of neighboring farmers are given a tour of the farm, after which they meet in the dining-room of the farmhouse with Napoleon (a type of Stalin) and the other pigs. Mr. Pilkington makes a toast to Animal Farm and its efficiency. Napoleon then offers a speech in which he outlines his new policies: The word "comrade" will be suppressed, there will be no more Sunday meetings, the skull of old Major has been buried, and the farm flag will be changed to a simple field of green. His greatest change in policy, however, is his announcement that Animal Farm will again be called Manor Farm. Soon after Napoleon's speech, the men and pigs begin playing cards, but a loud quarrel erupts when both Napoleon and Pilkington each try to play the ace of spades. As Clover and the other animals watch the arguments through the dining-room window, they are unable to discriminate between the humans and the pigs...

Arabia at $39. With Iranian sanctions being lifted Russia will find another inexpensive competitor increasing production and pushing Russia further down the list of suppliers.
As for Iranian sanctions, the 6 countries lifting them allowing Iran to collect on the billions it is owed for pumping oil but not being paid for it. These billions Iran can only get if the Iranian nuclear deal is signed. Trump spoke of ending the deals which would cause oil sales sanctions to be reimposed, which would make Russian oil more competitive.

"7) Rex Tillerson (Trump's pick for Secretary of State) is the head of ExxonMobil, which is in possession of patented technology that could help Putin extract 45% more oil at a significant cost savings to Russia, helping Putin put money in the Russian coffers to help reconstitute its military and finally afford to mass produce the new and improved systems that it had invented before the Russian economy had slowed so much.

"8) Putin cannot get access to these new cost saving technologies or outside oil field development money, due to US sanctions on Russia, because of its involvement in Ukrainian civil war.

"9) Look for Trump to end sanctions on Russia and to back out of the Iranian nuclear deal, to help Russia rebuild its economy, strengthen Putin and make Tillerson and Trump even richer, thus allowing Trump to satisfy his creditors at Blackstone. [Of these predictions, only the ending of the Iranian nuclear deal was fulfilled.]

"10) With Trump's fabricated hatred of NATO and the UN, and the Russian military reconstituted, the threat to the Baltic states is real. Russia retaking their access to the Baltic Sea from Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia and threatening the shipping of millions of cubic feet of natural gas to lower Europe from Scandinavia, allowing Russia to make a good case for its oil and gas being piped into eastern Europe."[30]

In this connection, we should recall that Leninism and banditism have existed in the closest symbiosis in Russia ever since Stalin robbed the Tbilisi bank and the Sochi post office to provide Lenin with funds for revolutionary terror in the early 1900s. The victims in the 1920s were the nobles, the industrialists and the Church, in the 1930s - the peasants, the generals and the Old Bolsheviks, in the 1940s - the Germans, the Crimean Tatars and other conquered peoples, and in the 1990s - all small-time investors and account-holders. In the 2000s it was the oligarchs' turn: in true Leninist style, Putin "expropriated the expropriators".

[30] Sargent, in Tatiana Spector, *Facebook,* July 27, 2018.

The gap between the richest and the poorest in Russia became the highest in the world except in some Caribbean islands. State institutions and services, such as education and health, were starved of funds. The only notable exceptions were the armed forces and security services, which received vast increases reminiscent of Hitler's rearming in the 1930s. Moreover, Putin increased the numbers of bureaucrats, 78% of whom are now KGB[31], and increased their pay. In this way he guaranteed their support, a tactic he borrowed from the Bolsheviks in the Civil War period…

3. The Religious Revolution

A third major change of tactics from Soviet times that Putin's revolution has necessitated is in relation to religion; from being militantly antichristian, the revolution he embodies has become, supposedly, Christian… There is a striking resemblance to Napoleon here. For Napoleon, like Putin, was at first a godless revolutionary who then became a "Christian" emperor crowned in church with a pope in attendance, before trying to spread his empire by fire and sword throughout Europe…

So we may ask of him, as many asked of Napoleon: is he of Christ or Antichrist?

Now the word "Antichrist" has a dual meaning. The preposition "anti" in Greek can mean either "against" or "in the place of". The Soviet regime was clearly "against" Christ – it murdered millions of Christians, and persecuted the faith in word and deed. However, it did not pretend to "take the place of" Christ or God. For how could it take the place of a being that, according to communists, does not exist?

But the Soviet regime came to an end in 1991, and with it so did the open persecution of Christians. There were few left who were openly "anti" – in the sense of "against" – Christ. There were still very many atheists and heretics, but no more "God-fighters"; all the surviving former God-fighters were living on their pensions; "God-fighting" was no longer legal or in any way approved.

And yet Putin does not clearly renounce the God-fighting, Stalinist past; he fiercely defends Stalin's record in, for example, the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact; and he claims to be the successor both of the democratic RSFSR, of the communist USSR, and of the pre-revolutionary Russian Orthodox Empire, both politically and spiritually. Thus on "a visit to Ukraine in 2013, he celebrated the 1,025th anniversary of the Baptism of Rus' to Orthodox Christianity

[31] Alexander Podrabinek, "Chekisty na marshe. Vlast' i Tserkov', *Radio Svoboda,* May 29, 2015.

in 988. “At… the Monastery of the Caves in Kiev, Putin declared: ‘We are all spiritual heirs of what happened here … and in this sense we are, without a doubt, one people.’” At the same time, Putin’s regime may be described as both neo-Soviet and neo-Fascist, without the apparatus of conventional Marxism but with “Communist Christianity”, drawing support from a heady mixture of conflicting constituencies: nationalists and democrats and monarchists, Orthodox Christians and pagan mystics and dyed-in-the-wool atheists, westerners and capitalists, mafiosi bandits and Slavophiles. Putin aims to find a place in his all-embracing heart for all the Russias of the last century – and all its faiths going back a thousand years to 988.

Superficially, moreover, Russia has indeed undergone a remarkable transition from God-hating to God-fearing. “In Russia, the numbers of people claiming to be ‘Orthodox’ increased from 31% to 72% between 1991 and 2008, while regular church attendance [grew] from 2% to 7%. In such a context, the potential power granted by Christian trappings should not be underestimated.”[32] Churches and monasteries have multiplied.

And yet Putin is no believer. On September 8, 2000, when asked by the American television journalist Larry King whether he believed in God, he replied: “I believe in people…” This refusal to confess a faith in God is not surprising. It should be remembered, as Konstantin Preobrazhensky points out, that Putin “began his career not in the intelligence ranks but in the ‘Fifth Branch’ of the Leningrad Regional KGB, which also fought religion and the Church. Putin carefully hides this fact from foreign church leaders, and you will not find it in any of his official biographies…

“The myth of Putin’s religiosity is important for proponents of ‘the union’ [of the ‘Red’ Moscow Patriarchate with the ‘White’ Russian Church Abroad, which took place in 2007]. It allows Putin to be characterized as some Orthodox Emperor Constantine, accepting the perishing Church Abroad under his regal wing. For his kindness we should be stretching out our arms to him with tears of gratitude…”[33]

“For those who claim,” writes Professor Olga Ackerly, “that the ‘CIS is different from the USSR’ and Putin is a ‘practising Orthodox Christian’, here are some sobering facts. The first days and months Putin’s presidency were highlighted by the reestablishment of a memorial plaque on Kutuzovsky Prospect where Andropov used to live. The plaque was a symbol of communist despotism missing since

[32] **“Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump’s great success in exploiting the rise of nationalist Christianity”, *The Conversation,* March 20, 2018.**

[33] Preobrazhensky, *KGB/FSB’s New Trojan Horse: Americans of Russian Descent*, North Billerica, Ma.: Gerard Group Publishing, 2008, p. 97; *KGB v russkoj emigratsii*, p. 102.

the 1991 putsch, bearing Andropov's name – a former head of the KGB, especially known for his viciousness in the use of force and psychiatric clinics for dissidents. On May 9, 2000, Putin proposed a toast to the 'genius commander' Iosif Stalin and promoted many former KGB officers to the highest state positions…

"Important to note is that the Eurasian movement, with ties to occultism, ecumenism, etc. was recently revived by Putin, and a Congress entitled 'The All-Russian Political Social Movement', held in Moscow in April of 2001, was 'created on the basis of the Eurasist ideology and *inter-confessional* [sic!] harmony in support of the reforms of President Vladimir Putin.' The movement is led by Alexander Dugin, a sexual mystic, National Bolshevik Party member, son of a Cheka cadre, personally familiar with the so-called 'Black International', advisor to the State Duma, and participant in Putin's 'Unity' movement."[34]

Again, while claiming to be a devout Orthodox, as George Sprukts wrote in 2004,

"1) he lights menorahs when he worships at his local synagogue;

"2) he has worshipped the mortal remains of Kin Il Sung in North Korea;

"3) he has worshipped the mortal remains of Mahatma Gandhi;

"4) he 'believes not in God, but in Man' (as he himself has stated);

"5) he was initiated into an especially occult form of 'knighthood' in Germany;

"6) he has restored the communist anthem;

"7) he has restored the bloody red rag as the RF's military banner;

"8) he has not removed the satanic pentagram from public buildings (including cathedrals);

"9) he has plans of restoring the monument to 'Butcher' Dzerzhinsky;

"10) he has not removed the satanic mausoleum in Red Square nor its filthy contents."[35]

[34] Ackerly, "High Treason in ROCOR: The Rapprochement with Moscow", pp. 21, 25.

[35] Sprukts, "Re: [paradosis] A Russian Conversation in English", orthodoxtradition@yahoogroups.com, 24 June, 2004. In 2013 Putin went to Israel, put on a Jewish skull-cap and prayed at the Wailing Wall. It seems that he approved of the idea of rebuilding the Jewish Temple…

This is not the behaviour of an Orthodox Christian in even the loosest sense…

Let us go back to the year 1998, when Putin became director of the FSB (KGB). The KGB was, as it were, the executive agency of the Soviet government's war against God. Therefore for such a man to become president only a few months later was a profound shock and a stern warning for those with eyes to see and ears to hear. It was as if the head of the Inquisition had become head of the World Council of Churches, or Himmler – the president of Germany after the war. But it was tolerated in Russia, first, because, as surveys showed, most Russians still considered the Soviet Union to be their native country, and Lenin and Stalin to be heroes; and secondly, because the West clung on to the stupid belief that over seventy years of the most terrible blood-letting in history – far longer and far more radical than Hitler's twelve years in power – could be wiped out and reversed without any kind of decommunization, without even a single person being put on trial for the murdering of innocent people in the name of the "collective Antichrist" of Soviet power. The tragic farce has reached such a stage that the KGB has become a hero of Russia literature and cinematography, with its own church in the middle of its chief prison, the Lubyanka in Moscow – not, as it might be thought to commemorate the martyrs who suffered so terribly within its walls, but for the executioners! The West concurred with this filthy whitewash; the official Orthodox Church (itself ruled by KGB agents) concurred; the masses of the Russian people concurred by voting Putin into power repeatedly and then approving of his revolutionary new constitution in 2020. It remains to be seen whether his popularity will survive his invasion of Ukraine in February, 2022…

On coming to power, without repenting in the slightest of his communist past, Putin gradually reintroduced more and more Soviet traditions and symbols. He even claimed to have been baptised and to wear a cross! So, from being part of the body of the Soviet Antichrist, which was "anti", that is, "against" Christ, he is now preaching a form of Communist Christianity that, as Makarkin puts it, "copies" Jesus Christ, placing its own ideas "in the place" of Christ's and passing them off as His.

And if the "copy" is a poor one – just as Lenin's mummified body is a very poor imitation of the relics of the saints, and the "Code of Law of the Builder of Communism" is a very poor imitation of the Sermon on the Mount - this does not matter, so long as the masses are taken in by it, or, if not taken in by it, at least convinced that Christ and the antichristian state are now on the same side...

So the Russian revolution has mutated from one kind of Antichristianity to another, from Lenin's Antichristianity that was openly against Christ, to Putin's Antichristianity which tries to take His place...

There can be no doubt that this new, more sophisticated kind of Antichristianity is more dangerous than the former – and closer to the kind that will be practised by "the personal Antichrist" himself at the end of time. For of that Antichrist the Lord said: "I have come in My Father's name and you do not believe Me: if another shall come in his own name, him you will believe" (John 5.43). In other words, you have rejected the real Christ, and as a direct result you will accept an imposter, a man-god, instead of the real thing, the God-Man. Putin has certainly shown every sign of enjoying his man-god status. It may even explain the extraordinarily foolish miscalculation he made in invading Ukraine in February 2022 – the act of hubris that may well be his nemesis...

Although Putin is clearly not an Orthodox Christian, he has many reasons for pretending to be one and for protecting the official Orthodox church. First, the MP hierarchs are his partners in organized crime and fellow agents in the KGB. This is illustrated by the activities of "the tobacco metropolitan", now Patriarch Cyril Gundyaev, KGB Agent "Mikhailov", who, as the Bulgarian Prime Minister has recently complained, imports tobacco and alcohol duty-free and is a billionaire.[36] Cyril, though a monk, has a registered wife and children. (It is more usual, however, for a MP bishop to be a homosexual, so Cyril may be considered to be above the moral norm for MP bishops.) Another example is Metropolitan Sergei (Fomin) of Voronezh. He has been a KGB Officer since 1969, and has been involved in crime, money laundering, drugs and fraud. He owns more than $150 million, which is deposited mainly in offshore accounts. Metropolitan Vladimir of Irkutsk has been identified as a murderer. Metropolitan George of Istra (offshore capital: over $100 million) is linked with the Mafia and child trafficking. Similarly with Metropolitan Leo of Novgorod. The MP's enormous property portfolio, of which the hotel Danilovskaia is only one small element, is beginning to elicit unfavourable comment in the country. However, Putin is not yet ready to throw his ecclesiastical colleagues to the wolves. Besides, they are useful to him in important ways.

Thus Patriarch Cyril is useful, first, as a diplomat serving the interests of Putin. He does a considerable amount of external

[36] "In 1995, the Nikolo-Ugreshky Monastery, which is directly subordinated to the patriarchate, earned $350 million from the sale of alcohol. The patriarchate's department of foreign church relations, which Cyril ran, earned $75 million from the sale of tobacco. But the patriarchate reported an annual budget in 1995-1996 of only $2 million. Cyril's personal wealth was estimated by *the Moscow News* in 2006 to be $4 billion." (http://news-nftu.blogspot.com, February, 2009)

diplomacy, mainly among church leaders, both Orthodox and heterodox, but also with State leaders. For example, he has always maintained cordial relations with the Communist revolutionary Fidel Castro, and in 2016 he chose to meet the Pope in Cuba! A French comment on this meeting: "Cuba is at the same time a Catholic and a Communist land. Thus neither side had the feeling of going to Canossa." Indeed, this is the essence of the matter. Patriarch Cyril did not come to the meeting as a representative of Orthodoxy, but as a representative of Putin. This was a meeting of states, not of Churches.

Still more important is Cyril's role as cheerleader for Putinism. Although the continuance in power of the heretical and deeply corrupt MP is a matter of deep sorrow for all truly Orthodox Christians, nevertheless there can be no denying that there has been a sharp growth in Orthodox religiosity in Russia since 1991. Millions of sincere if deluded people are ready to follow their leader wherever he points – whether it is in condemning the Ukrainian schismatics who reject the authority of the (schismatical and heretical) MP, or in labelling the Ukrainians as "neo-Nazis", or in hypocritically condemning the West for its lack of Christian values, in praising the "holy wars" in Georgia, Ukraine and Syria.

Putin's holier-than-thou propaganda campaign began in about 2006, at just the time that he was preparing his invasion of fellow Orthodox country, Georgia. It intensified during the Kievan counter-revolution in 2013 and in Russia's invasion of Crimea and Ukraine in 2013. Putin's problem here is: the extreme moral degradation of contemporary Russian society is plain for all to see. For under the watch of Putin and Gundiaev, these profoundly immoral moralists, Russia's already shocking statistics on a wide variety of social indices – social equality, corruption, alcoholism, drug-taking, child mortality, suicide – have got worse, making her comparable only to some of the poorest and most corrupt nations of the Third World.

Thus according to United Nations statistics cited by Vladimir Ruscher, Russia occupies the following positions in the world league tables:

1st in suicides of adults, children and adolescents;
1st in numbers of children born out of wedlock;
1st in children abandoned by parents;
1st in absolute decline in population;
1st in consumption of spirits and spirit-based drinks;
1st in consumption of strong alcohol;
1st in tobacco sales;
1st in deaths from alcohol and tobacco;
1st in deaths from cardiovascular diseases;
2nd in fake medicine sales;

1st in heroin consumption (21st in world production).

These statistics show that Russia is very near the top of the world league as regards criminality, theft, corruption and murder (including abortion), and this not least because the government itself has taken the lead in these matters, making Russia into a mafia state run by and for a small clique of fantastically rich criminals. Thus the general picture is one of *extreme moral degradation.*

The most obvious explanation for this during Soviet rule was the persecution of religious faith. However, Putin puts the blame exclusively on the Yeltsin period (because that was the most westernizing). Before Yeltsin, as he argued in 2012 in a speech to the Federal Assembly, Soviet society had been distinguished by "charity, compassion and sympathy" (!!!) "Today," however, "Russian society has an obvious deficit in spiritual bonds, a deficit in everything that made us at all times stronger, more powerful, in which we always prided ourselves – that is, such phenomena as charity, compassion and sympathy… The situation that has been created is a consequence of the fact that some 15 to 20 years ago 'the ideological stamps of the former epoch' were rejected… Unfortunately, at that time many moral signposts were lost…"

However, at the Valdai forum in 2013 Putin said: "Many Euro-Atlantic countries have de facto gone down the path of the rejection of… Christian values. Moral principles are being denied… What could be a greater witness of the moral crisis of the human socium than the loss of the capacity for self-reproduction. But today practically all developed countries can no longer reproduce themselves. Without the values laid down in Christianity and other world religions, without the norms of ethics and morality formed in the course of millennia, people inevitably lose their human dignity. And we consider it natural and right to defend these values."[37]

The strange thing about this statement is that Putin seems entirely unconscious of the fact that with regard to the "Christian value" that he cites here, "self-reproduction", Russia performs worse than any western country. Thus even after taking migration into account, the twenty-eight countries of the European Union have a natural growth in population that is twice as high as Russia's! And if he is referring not to the balance between the birth rate and the death rate, but to *homosexuality* as a factor that by definition inhibits reproduction, then the situation is little better in Russia than in the West.

[37] Andrei Movchan, "Rossia i Zapad: kto moral'nee?" (Russia and the West: who is more moral?"), http://slon.ru/russia/rossiya_i_zapad_kto_moralnee-1114248.xhtml, June 17, 2014.

For in spite of Putin's much-vaunted ban on pro-gay propaganda to minors, the vice remains legal among adults. Thus many in Putin's entourage are homosexual; during the Winter Olympiad there were two openly gay bars in Sochi; while a marriage between two women was registered in Moscow.[38]

Homosexuality flourishes even in places from which it should have been banished first of all. Thus among the three hundred bishops of the Moscow Patriarchate, 50 according to one estimate (Fr. Andrei Kuraiev) and 250 according to another (Fr. Gleb Yakunin), are homosexuals. It is even claimed that promotion up the hierarchical ladder of the MP is possible only by serving the sexual needs of a bishop higher up the ladder…

Putin shows a marked antipathy to the West, and steadfastly proclaims that his country is morally superior to it. Probably the main reason why so many Christians[39] support him, is his claim to be restoring "Christian values" to Russia by contrast with "Eurosodom" and the decadent West…. "We have to give him a chance," is the view. And if he succeeds, then Christianity as a whole is the winner…

On the face of it, Putin's devotion to "traditional Christian values" seems genuine. As Steve Turley writes, "In Russia, there have been over 15,000 churches rebuilt since the end of communism. Article 148 of the Russian criminal code, which Vladimir Putin signed in June of 2013, threatens prison sentences of up to three years for 'insulting the feelings of Christian believers.' And on the very day that law was passed, a law was approved that prohibits so-called 'homosexual propaganda.' And of course, the laws against offending the church were used to incarcerate the punk rock band Pussy Riot when they desecrated two churches with lewd and inappropriate behavior. Putin has banned abortion ads, and signed legislation banning abortion after 12 weeks of pregnancy, all the while the Russian Orthodox Church is calling for an all-out ban on abortions."[40]

But if we look more closely, we see many reasons to question this judgement. Take the issue of abortions. Although the rate of abortions has fallen (as in other parts of Orthodox Eastern Europe, such as Georgia), there are some anomalies. Thus on January 22, 2012, the patriarch made an interesting proposal in the Russian Duma: to increase the rate that doctors charge for abortions. This would have the pleasing consequences of squeezing the rich (not

[38] "V Moskve pozhenili dvukh nevest" (In Moscow two brides were married), http://www.kp.ru/daily/26270/3148680/

[39] See the American conservative evangelical Pat Buchanan, "Whose Side is God on Now?", http://buchanan.org/blog/whose-side-god-now-6337, April 4, 2014.

[40] Turley, "The Reawakening of Christian Civilization in Eastern Europe", *Katehon,* January 19, 2017, http://katehon.com/article/reawakening-christian-civilization-eastern-europe.

the really rich, like himself, but the middle classes) and reducing the rate of abortions, thereby slowing down the catastrophic fall in Russia's population. How moral! How financially prudent! How farsightedly caring about the demography of the Russian nation! Not a word, however, about the fact that abortion – any abortion, carried out for any or no price – is murder, and condemns the abortionist for eternity to the fire of hell! Not a word about the fact that Russia is number one in the world for numbers of abortions per head of population. And not a word about the fact that (as the present writer has seen with his own eyes) placards outside churches proclaim it is possible to *buy* absolution from the sin of abortion from MP priests for a tidy sum of money.

Of course, the West has only itself to blame for much of this. Thus its decision to join the civil war in Syria on the side of the Sunni rebels has enabled Putin to put himself forward as the champion, not only of the Shiites, but also of those Christians who have suffered at the hands of the rebels.

Again, the West's mindless pursuit of the LGBT agenda has enabled Putin to portray himself as the champion of traditional Christianity. Of course, the irony is mind-boggling: the KGB, the biggest killer of Christians in history, which has regularly used well-trained heterosexual and homosexual prostitute-spies (see the 2018 film *Red Sparrow*) to pursue its ends, is now hailed as the champion of traditional Christian values!… But the level of historical knowledge in the West is now so low that younger generations in America, for example, scarcely have the first idea of what the Russian revolution and the KGB was.

"'Russia has been using this issue to develop a constituency in Muslim and African countries,' says Mark Gevisser, an Open Society fellow who is writing a book on the global debate on gay rights. 'This brand of ideological moral conservatism was originally minted in the US. It is highly ironic that these countries are mounting an anti-western crusade using a western tool. Moscow plays on opposition to gay rights most effectively closer to home. Last November, when it looked like the Ukrainian Viktor Yanukovych was close to signing an Association Agreement with the European Union, billboards appeared across the country warning that the 'EU means legislating same-sex marriage' ['EURO=HOMO']. The campaign was paid for by Ukraine's Choice, a group associated with the Kremlin-connected politician and businessman Viktor Medvedchuk."[41]

Putin has clearly not renounced communism. As he said in 2016 to the Pan-Russian People's Front: "You know that like millions of Soviet citizens – over 20 million – I used to be a member

[41] Owen Matthews, "Putin's Masterplan", *The Spectator,* 22 February, 2014, pp. 12-13.

of the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union), and not just a regular member: for almost 20 years I worked for the organisation called the Committee for State Security of the Soviet Union [KGB]. This organisation derives from the Cheka [Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution and Sabotage], which was then called the armed unit of the Party. If for some reason a person left the Communist Party, they were immediately fired from the KGB. I did not join the party simply because I had to, though I cannot say I was such a dedicated communist, but I treated this with great care. As opposed to numerous party functionaries, I was not one of them; I was a rank-and-file member. As opposed to many functionaries, I did not trash my membership card, I did not burn it. I would not want to criticize anyone now – people had different motives and this is their own business. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union fell apart; my membership card is still out there somewhere.

"I have always liked communist and socialist ideas. If we consider the Code of the Builder of Communism that was widely published in the Soviet Union, it strongly resembles the Bible. This is not a joke; it was actually an excerpt from the Bible. It spoke of good things: equality, fraternity, happiness. However, the practical implementation of these ideals in this country had little in common with what the utopian socialists Saint-Simon or Owen spoke about. This country had little resemblance to their Sun City."[42]

Andrei Melnikov writes that his recent words "to the effect that the communist ideology is 'very close' to Christianity, were uttered in a documentary film 'Valaam' that was shown on January 14 of this year [2018] on the television channel 'Russia 1'. They elicited a strong reaction even in spite of the fact that the Russian president had expounded similar views earlier. The head of the government's thought has probably sounded particularly clearly now in view of the beginning of the presidential campaign. Let us note that the maker of the film was the journalist Andrei Kondrashov, who was recently appointed head of Putin's pre-election campaign headquarters. The president visited Valaam monastery in June, 1917, and he has been there before.

"Faith," said Putin "has always accompanied us. It has become stronger when our country was suffering particularly intensely during the most God-fighting years, when priests were killed and churches destroyed. But at the same time, you know, they created a new religion' – the communist ideology, - which 'is very akin to Christianity'. 'Freedom, brotherhood, equality, justice – all these are invoked in the Holy Scriptures, it's all there. And what of the 'Law Code of the Builder of Communism'? This was a sublimation, a

[42] http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/page/130.

primitive excerpt from the Bible, they didn't think up anything new there'."

"Let us recall," continues Melnikov, "that the president said similar things earlier. For example, during his speech in 2016 before the activists of the Pan-Russian People's Front – a structure that had played the role of locomotive in the preceding electoral campaign of the acting president. 'I very much like and to this day I still like communist and socialist ideas,' said Putin then. 'If we look at the 'Law Code of the Builder of Communism', which was published in large quantities in the Soviet Union, we see that it is very reminiscent of the Bible. This is no joke, this is in fact an extract from the Bible.' 'But the practical incarnations of these remarkable ideas in our country were far from what the socialist utopians expounded. Our country was not like the City of the Sun', explained the head of the Russian state to the PPF activists.

"However, this time Putin added one more 'burning' topic – the fate of Lenin's body in the Mausoleum. The past year was marked, in connection with the 100th anniversary of the revolution, by a sharpening of the discussion over the burial of the leader of the world revolution. One of those who expressed himself in favour a 'normal' burial of Lenin was the head of Chechnya Ramzan Kadyrov, after which he had a bit of a quarrel with the president of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation Gennady Ziuganov.

"'Look,' said Putin, 'they put Lenin in the Mausoleum. In what does this differ from the relics of the saint? For the Orthodox, or simply for Christians? When they tell me: there is no such tradition in the Christian world, how come? Go to Athos and look. There they have holy relics. Yes, and here (on Valaam) there are also holy relics, those of Sergius and Herman.' 'In essence, the authorities at that time thought up nothing new. They simply adapted what humanity had already long ago invented to their own ideology,' explained the head of the state.

"These words on 'relics' received a stormy reaction from the State Duma Deputy Natalya Poklonskaya, who in the course of the past year, in unison with Kadyrov, spoke out for the burial of Lenin. 'In my view, it would be incorrect and a consciously self-interested distortion, for political or other motives, to use and interpret 'in one's own way' the words of the president on a certain parallel between the dead body of Ulyanov in the Mausoleum, on whose conscience are millions of murdered people, and the holy relics in the monasteries and churches. The opinion he voiced is not about that, but about government regimes and the attempt to create a false religion at a definite stage of history,' wrote Poklonskaya in her account on *Facebook*.

However, the words on the Mausoleum were received with rapture by the communists headed by Gennady Ziuganov. On the one hand, this is understandable: Ziuganov has himself expressed analogous idea about the similarity between the moral imperatives of communism and those of Christianity. ‘If you take the Moral ‘Code of Law of the Builder of Communism’ and the Sermon on the Mount of Jesus Christ and put them side to side, you will be surprised: the texts coincide completely,’ declared the leader of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation in 2012 in an interview on the same ‘Russia 1’ channel. On the other hand, the rhetoric of compromise addressed to the older generation, who are not indifferent to their memories of the Soviet past, contributes to the rising popularity of Pavel Grudinin, a candidate for the presidency from the CPRF.

“If all this is understandable for the communist electorate, there remains the question: to what extent do the thoughts of the president chime in with the point of view of the church? If we are to take the opinion of Patriarch Cyril of Moscow and All Russia as the official position of the ROC, then it is impossible for us not to register the striking consonance between his sermons and the speeches of Putin on the issue in question, with the exception, perhaps, of his words on Lenin. On April 6, 2011 in Kiev the head of the ROC said: ‘Even the years of life in the conditions of unbelief did not root out in us that very programme which was laid as a certain Code of development of our Orthodox peoples. And in this sense the unbelievers of the Soviet period were in a rudimentary way Orthodox Christians – they remained in the same system of values… At that time atheist ideology wanted to reform the system of values, but did not encroach on morality. Take the very ‘Code of Law of the Builder of Communism’ – it was dictated from the Bible. Without God, but the same morality.’ However, with regard to the burial of Lenin, the representatives of the Church in 2017 more than once said that it was necessary to wait with that.

“’Putin’s real ideas about Christian values are hidden from us,’ thinks the leader of the Centre for the Study of Problems of Religion and Society at the Institute of Europe RAN, Roman Lunkin. ‘The president has not spoken about fulfilling the Gospel commandments or about his parish life.’ ‘For Putin the important things in public are formalities – his baptism in childhood, Orthodoxy as an element consolidating society, his principled visits to a simple church service at Christmas and more officially – at Pascha,’ said the religious expert of ‘NGR’.

“A leading expert of the Centre for Political Technologies, Alexei Makarkin, pointed to the fact that ‘in his interview Putin did not say that this was Christian tradition in its pure form, that would have been strange: he spoke about copying tradition, and the striving of the essentially antichristian party to borrow something.’ ‘In this way

each auditorium can read what it wants,' explained the political expert. 'The main auditorium – nostalgic Russians – can read in it the main thing that Putin is against – that Lenin should be take out of the Mausoleum, at any rate now. At the same time there is another variant for people holding other views, in the first place believers: who, from the point of view of the believers, will copy Jesus Christ? He will be copied by the Antichrist, who will try to make out that he is Jesus, being in actual fact his most terrible enemy. For the Christians there could be the following interpretation: since the president recognizes that the communists can copy certain Christian traditions, that means that everything is in fact like that – the enemies of Christ are trying to copy, while at the same time distorting, ' said Markarkin of the 'NGR'." [43]

This article goes a long way to answering the question that has exercised and divided Russian True Orthodox Christians: is Putin's regime a reincarnation of the antichristian Soviet regime, or something new (and supposedly better)? If the former, then it lies under the same anathema of the Moscow Council of 1918 that fell on the obviously antichristian Soviet regime and all those who cooperated with it. If the latter, then it does not fall under the anathema and is acceptable and legitimate. However, this "either/or" formulation of the question is misleading; it fails to take into account the possibility that Putin's regime is *worse* than the Soviet regime, being antichristian in a different, more subtle and more profound manner.

But we must not be deceived, remembering Putin's words: "Once a chekist, always a chekist…"

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[43] Melnikov, "Valaamovo otkrovenie dlia chetvertogo sroka" (A Valaam Revelation for a Fourth Term), *N-G Religia,* Putin, Interview reported on *Russia Today,* 2018.